



Cornish Global Migration Programme

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## **THE BURIAL GROUNDS OF SINGAPORE**

In the early days after the founding of modern Singapore, the small population was confined within the city environs in the south of the island. The only Christian cemetery at that time was situated on Fort Canning Hill. It was soon deemed that cemeteries should be sited far away from the more populated areas. New cemeteries were created, first at Bukit Timah, and later, at Bidadari. Soon after, the burgeoning population began to spread throughout Singapore. Many plantations and the associated residential enclaves sprouted. Different cemeteries sprang up to serve the various ethnic groups and religions.

The tiny island of Singapore, nestled between Malaysia and Indonesia, covers 251 square miles and in that small area there is a population of over 4 million. The way land is utilised in Singapore is of vital importance. Towards the end of the twentieth century the authorities decided that the amount of land devoted to burials was disproportionate and that some land would be reclaimed for the living. It was decided in the early 1990's to devote a smaller quantity of land for the dead and so reclaimed large areas for the living. Over the next twenty years the Singaporean government exhumed the bodies from over 36 old and disused cemeteries of different races and religions. The land was then utilised for public housing estates and commercial use.

Singapore is not generally recognised as a destination for the Cornish Diaspora. However, as a great entrepot, situated at the southern end of a peninsular embracing Burma, Thailand and Malaysia, this island housed many offices associated with mining, particularly tin mining and rubber plantations. Inevitably, people from Cornwall were to be found amongst the hustle and bustle of this dynamic nation. It was therefore decided that, during a trip to Singapore, to take time out to record any traces left by the Cornish, particularly through any memorials that may have existed or are still extant.

Many burial grounds as well as churches and the cathedral were visited and public memorials viewed. The efficient Singapore National Archives were also of assistance. This study sets out details of the few 'Cornish' memorials that were traced as well as others that may be of peripheral interest. Also included are some extracts from the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* which recorded within their columns some Cornish births, marriages and deaths in Singapore. Unless otherwise stated, all photographs are by the author. A collection of 243 digital photographs taken in Singapore have been deposited with the Cornish Global Migration Programme at Murdoch House, Redruth, Cornwall.

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### **Fort Canning Cemetery (Burials from 1822 to 1907)**

Fort Canning is the most historic part of Singapore. The Fort was named in 1861 in the honour of Viscount Charles John Canning, the first Viceroy of India. However, Malay and Chinese historic records date back to the fourteenth century. The hill underwent several name changes. The Malays called it Bukit Larangan (Forbidden Hill), but later on the Malay name for Fort Canning was Bukit Tuan Bonham, after Sir Samuel George Bonham, Governor 1836-48. In the latter part of the 19th century it was called Bukit Bendera (Flag Hill), because of the signals made for shipping from its flag staff. Sir Stamford Raffles claimed the hill for his residence, naming it Government Hill in 1822. Until mid-19th century, Singapore's governors were residents here; thus the epithet 'Government Hill' as well as 'Central Park'. Until the 1970's Fort Canning was used as a military base, first by the British, then by the Japanese during the occupation and then by the Republic's armed forces. The hill is now a fabulous park, within a short walk from the city centre, full of amazing trees, ferns and orchids as well as wild life.



*The Barracks, Fort Canning*

Amongst this fauna and flora are located many historic features and buildings, including Raffles House, the Fort Gate, the famed 'Battle Box' from World War II, the Light House and flag staff. On the lower slopes of the west side are found the Singapore National Archives as well as the History Museum. Near the centre of the park is located the Fort Canning Centre, this massive building was constructed in 1926 as an army barracks, it currently houses some of Singapore's cultural groups. In front of this centre is Fort Canning Green - the old Christian Cemetery.



*Memorials set into the south boundary wall at Fort Canning*

The first burial ground for westerners in Singapore was located at Fort Canning near Raffles Terrace and started about 1815. However, this was too close to the Governors residence and so, in about 1822, a new burial ground was opened in the area now known as The Green. On the north and south sides of this burial ground two massive gothic style gateways were erected following a design by Captain Charles Edward Faber, Superintending Engineer. These gateways have survived. The cemetery rapidly filled and was not used after 1865 (it was replaced by Bukit Timah cemetery - see below).

When the Barracks were built in 1926 the burial ground was partly cleared of the numerous and tightly packed memorials and a green created. In 1977 many of the inscription plaques from the memorials were set into the walls which surround the Green and many other memorials removed. A few features were left in place (particularly the memorial to James Brooke Napier as well as the enigmatic cupolas). When Bukit Timah cemetery closed in 1970s, about a dozen memorials were moved to the north west section of this cemetery. It is believed that about 600 interments took place in this burial ground. The cemetery has been referred to as “Christian”, “European” or “British”. None of these descriptions seem adequate. It is recorded that a wall used to divide the northern section from the southern section with Anglicans being buried in the later and other Christian denominations in the northern section. A headstone in the northern wall carries an image of the star of David, indicating a Jewish burial (a Jewish burial ground was extant in Singapore, it opened in 1914 and closed in 1985 and is now ‘reclaimed’ land) and there are a smattering of Chinese headstones (probably Christian).

It does appear that the burial records for Fort Canning are no longer extant. Several years ago a local group of students brilliantly rubbed many of the plaques located in the walls. Copies of these rubbings are available from the Singapore National Archives. Below are some transcripts of the surviving inscriptions.

*JOHN K ELLIS late of Helston who died on 10 June 1858 aged 27.  
Much beloved and respected by friends.*

*Here lies KATE child of JAMES and ELLEN BELL aged 7 days, 23rd June, 1847.*  
Granite etched lettering painted white.

*Sacred to the memory of ELIZABETH relict of the late JAMES CASWELL of New South  
Wales who departed this life on the 4th November 1859, aged 52 years and 4 months.*  
Slate, etched painted white.

*In memory of Capt. Wm. DAWSON "British Barque Cornwall", who died here 27th July  
1858, aged 47 years. Respected, esteemed and beloved.*  
White marble etched, cracked in two, cemented together. Monumental mason : Llewelyn &  
Co. SCI.

*PAULA TEREIRA aged 4 years & .. Who deparT. This life on Saturday morning  
15th August 1634.*  
This marble plaque appears to have been roughly inscribed. It would appear that the wording  
has become distorted during amateur renovation work. The date of 1634 is highly improbable.  
And should probably be 1834 and the family name THEREIRA.

*Sacred to the memory of FREDERICK GEORGE CORNISH, Bengal Civil Service, youngest  
son of GEORGE CORNISH Esq and SARAH his wife, of Salcombe Regis, in the county of  
Devon, who departed this life on the 27th July 1828, aged 19 years.  
Veniet felecius evum quando iterum, sim modi dignus ero.*

*Sacred to the memory of Ed. GRAVES who departed this life on the 4th Sept. 1859, aged 49  
years. Born in Salem. Mas. USA.*

*Sacred to the memory of JOHN YOULTON LS of H.M.S. Sybillie who departed this life 2nd  
October 1854, aged 24 years.  
Erected by his shipmates as a tribute of their great esteem and regard.*

*Sacred to the memory of J. YOUNG M.M. "Wide Awake" died 16th March 1860, aged 39.  
Requiescat in Pace.*

*Sacred to the memory of JANE ELIZABETH the beloved wife of JOHN FLEMING MARTIN  
REID Esquire of the Bengal Civil Service. She departed this life at Singapore on the 25th day  
of July 1838, aged 37 years and 11 days.  
"The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job. 1. 21.*

Two plaques set into the wall belong to the Moyle family:

*In memora EDITH ELIZABETH eldest daughter of J. M. MOYLE & E. G. MOYLE who died  
Dec. 30th 1864, aged 16 years.  
Suffer little children to come unto me and .....*

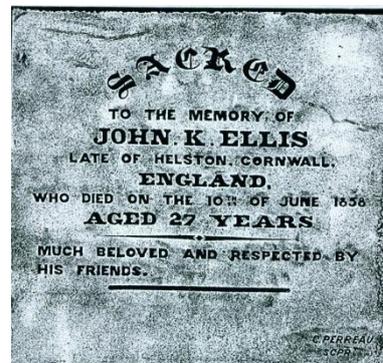
*Sacred to the memory of MARY MARRION the beloved wife of JOHN M. MOYLE  
who died 18th of January 1858 aged 43 years and 20 days.*

It would appear John Moyle remarried as the death of another wife was recorded in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* of 31st January 1867:

*Died - On her passage to England in the steamer Ajax, December 5, EMILY JANE, the beloved  
wife of JOHN M. MOYLE, Esq., of Singapore, and eldest daughter of H. T. PAGE, Esq., of  
Stainsby House, Stainsby Road, London, in the 27th year of her age.*



*The 'Ellis' Plaque,  
obscured by lichen,  
examined by the  
author. With a copy  
of the rubbing of the  
plaque held at the  
National Archives of  
Singapore.*



### **Bukit Timah Cemetery (Burials from 1864 to 1907)**

Sometimes known as 'New Cemetery'. This cemetery opened in 1864 (first burial was probably on 1st April 1865) to 1908. This cemetery was replaced in 1907 by Bidadari Cemetery (see below). The graves were all exhumed in the 1970s. The cemetery was located near what is now Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. Bukit Timah (meaning 'Tin Hill') is the highest point in Singapore (162 M) covering 81 hectares and is the only area of primary natural forest left on the island and is now a nature reserve, reputed to contain more species of trees than in the whole of North America. The burial registers for this cemetery appear to have been lost. Some monuments were moved to Fort Canning.

### **Bidadari Cemetery (Burials from 1907 to 1972)**

The Bidadari Cemetery was opened in 1907. "Bidadari" was derived from the Sanskrit word "widyadari"; meaning a nymph or fairy. Really a series of cemeteries - there were distinct sections for the multiethnic community and so there were separate areas Protestants, Catholics, Singhalese, Hindus and Muslims. The cemeteries were officially closed in 1972. In the Christian side, near the beautiful ornate gate at the central entrance, there once stood a small chapel where services were held, but that was torn down in the 1980s

"Under the 1998 Master Plan, the Bidadari Cemetery sites along Upper Serangoon Road will be developed into high-density housing and is projected to yield about 12,000 public-housing dwelling units. There will be modern amenities and facilities to complement the housing, including a park and other open spaces."

In the cemeteries were rows of gravestones and marble statues are spread over 64 acres, epitaphs were etched in a dozen languages, including Chinese, English, Portuguese, Japanese and Hindi. The Christian section was one of the largest to be cleared, it contained the remains of 58,000 Christians buried between 1907 and 1972, with most interred before 1951. It has been estimated that some 10 percent of these buried are European expatriates including businessmen from the colonial era, missionaries, and war casualties, many of the later, if British, were moved to Kranji war Cemetery. In addition 68,000 bodies will be exhumed from a neighbouring Muslim section and reburied elsewhere. All unclaimed Christian remains were cremated by the government and those ashes not claimed within a year, were scattered at sea. Headstones and sculptures could have been retrieved by relations, those that were not claimed were broken up and buried in a huge pit. Christian families who wished to rebury remains had to meet their own costs but the government reburied remains from faiths that ban cremation, including Muslims, Jews and Parsis. The authorities published notices about the exhumation in newspapers not just in Singapore but also Britain, Australia, India and Malaysia. Fortunately, Burial Registers for the Christian section have survived and can be consulted at the National Archives of Singapore.

One of the graves with its memorial "rescued" from the Christian cemetery was that of a Cornish war hero. HENRY WILLIAMS KERNICK, born in Bodmin in 1887, was awarded the Military Cross in the First world War. Henry Kernick worked for Singapore Tramways and was killed, together with a companion, in a motor accident in 1926. Following his burial at Bidadari his widow sent a Cornish granite cross to Singapore to mark his resting place. In 2004 the family arranged for his ashes and the memorial to be returned to Cornwall and they are now located in the churchyard extension at St Erth. The inscription on the Singapore memorial read :

*In dear memory of my beloved husband HENRY WILLIAMS KERNICK (BILLY) MC.,  
 who died suddenly May 24th 1926, aged 38.  
 All my heart is buried with you,  
 All my thoughts go onward with you.*

The Register of Burials for Bidadari, (Book 3 of 9) which is located in the National archives of Singapore describes Henry Kernick as of ‘Welsh’ nationality. The following is a full extract of the entry:

<i>No. Of Burial</i>	375	374
<i>Name</i>	<i>William Henry Kernick</i>	<i>Percy Norman Lowndes</i>
<i>Address</i>	<i>New Kepal Road</i>	<i>New Kepal Road</i>
<i>Age</i>	38	42
<i>Sex</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Welsh</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>Division</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Protestant</i>
<i>No of Plot</i>	5297	5293
<i>Cause of Death</i>	<i>Ruptured liver internal haemorrhage</i>	<i>Ruptured liver internal haemorrhage</i>
<i>Date of Death</i>	24/5/26	24/5/26
<i>Date of Burial</i>	25/4/26	25/5/26
<i>No. Of BurialCertificate</i>	528	527
<i>No. Of Receipt</i>	1624	1623
<i>Fee \$</i>	10/-	10/-
<i>Remarks</i>	-----	-----

The full story of the repatriation of the remains and memorial of Henry Williams Kernick appeared in the *West Briton* of 15th April 2004.



*The Kernick memorial at St. Erth, Cornwall*



*Scenes at Bidadari Cemetery - historic pictures.*

## **Kranji Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery**

The Kranji War Cemetery, together with the Singapore Memorial, The Hospital Memorial and Military Cemetery are all located in one site in northern Singapore and overlook the Straits of Johore. 22 Kilometres north of the city, just off the Singapore - Johore Road.

The KRANJI WAR CEMETERY holds 64 First World War burials and 4,461 Second World War burials, of which 850 are unmarked. Before 1939, Kranji was a military camp. At the time of the Japanese invasion, it was the site of a large ammunition magazine. After the fall of the island, the Japanese established a prisoner-of-war camp at Kranji and eventually a hospital was organized nearby at Woodlands. After the reoccupation of Singapore at the end of the war, the small cemetery started by the prisoners at Kranji was developed into a permanent war cemetery by the Army Graves Service when it became evident that a larger cemetery at Changi could not remain undisturbed. Changi had been the site of the main prisoner-of-war camp in Singapore and a large hospital had been set up there by the Australian Infantry Force. In 1946, the graves were moved from Changi to Kranji, as were those from the Buona Vista prisoner-of-war camp. Many other graves from all parts of the island were then transferred to Kranji, together with all Second World War burials from the Saigon Military Cemetery in French Indo-China (now Vietnam), graves of both world wars from the Bidadari Christian Cemetery Singapore and sites where permanent maintenance was not possible.

*The central aisle at Kranji Commonwealth War Cemetery*



The SINGAPORE MEMORIAL consists of large panels inscribed with over 24,000 casualties who have no known grave.

The HOSPITAL MEMORIAL is located on the east side of the Singapore Memorial. It commemorates 107 service personnel (300 civilians buried in the same grave are not listed on this memorial) who were buried in a mass grave in the grounds of Singapore Civil General Hospital. The grave at the hospital was originally an emergency water tank which had been dug in the hospital grounds and used by the Japanese as a mass grave. When the war cemetery was created in 1946 it was obvious that it would not be possible to identify the servicemen in the mass grave and so it was left undisturbed. There is a memorial (the present memorial replaced an earlier one) in the hospital grounds.

The MILITARY CEMETERY is a substantial non-world war site of 1,785 burials of military personnel and their families as well as two Gardens of Remembrance. The British forces withdrew from Singapore in 1971 and the Singapore Government moved burials from Pasir Panjang military cemetery. (This cemetery had been opened in 1955 and interments included servicemen's family members, it was cleared in 1976 to make way for a housing scheme) and Ulen cemeteries to Kranji. The new Military cemetery was created in 1975 on the western slopes of Kranji Hill beside the War Cemetery. In 2004 more 'military' graves were moved here from Bidadari cemetery. There is also 1 Netherlands Foreign National burial here. Unfortunately, many of the headstones give little more information than names.

A few kilometres from Kranji, the Japanese constructed, with prisoner of war labour, a large hill named Victory Hill. The ashes of 20,000 Japanese servicemen who died in the invasion were placed in this hill and a monument erected. In 1952 the British Military destroyed the monument and part of the hill, although there are rumours that traces of the steps leading to the top of the hill remain.

Some of the memorials at Kranji are in respect of Cornishmen who died in the war (the following information has been provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission):

*HAROLD GODFREY JENNINGS, born Truro. Planter at Brusei, Cairo and then Jendereek Estate in Malaya. Captain 4th Phang Battalion, Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. Died in captivity 28.3.1942, aged 37 years, at Miyako Hospital, Singapore. Son of the Revd. Canon Henry Richard Jennings B.A. And Susan Jennings of Kenwyn Vicarage, Truro. (Grave Ref. 34.C.20).*

Harold had two brothers, one died in Thailand during the Second World War and the other was killed in Malaya during the communist insurrection of 1948.

*CECIL NANKIVELL of the Royal Navy Service, No. /SS 125658, Stoker 1st Class. Died 10th December 1941, aged 46 years. Son of Cecil and Amelia Nankivell, husband of May Nankivell of Redruth, Cornwall. (Grave Ref. 35. D. 13).*

*FRANCIS (FRANK) SHRIMPTON, born Port Isaac, Cornwall, son of Robert J. Shrimpton and Marian Shrimpton. Assistant with Cumberbatch & Co. Ltd, 16, Barrack Road. Kuala Lumpa, Malaysia. Corporal 7890 Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. Killed in action, 13/02/1942., aged 29 years. (Grave Ref. 7.E.19).*



*Cecil Nankivell.*



*Harold Godfrey Jennings.*

*Below - Students from St Anthony School pay their respect and learn the lessons of war.*



## St. Andrew's Cathedral

In 1823 Sir Stamford Raffles chose the present site of the cathedral for a church, but it was not until 1834 that the foundation stone was laid. It was twice struck by lightning and closed in 1852, four years later the foundation stone of the present building was laid. In 1973 it was granted National Monument Status. It is not known whether any Cornish people are recorded on any of the numerous plaques located in the cathedral. One refers to a gentleman with a Cornish name:

To the memory of JOHN HARVEY A prominent resident here 1843 - 1858  
Died 6th June 1879, aged 58 years.

## Singapore Cenotaph

The Cenotaph, located in Esplanade Park, was erected in memory of those who sacrificed their lives in the First World War (1914-18). It was designed by Denis Santry and the substantial granite monument, topped with an urn, stands 10 metres tall. The foundation stone was laid on 15 November 1920 by Sir Laurence Guillemard, the Governor of the Straits Settlements. There are 124 names listed on bronze panels. Five steps lead up the memorial each year of the war carved into individual steps. Officially unveiled on 31 March 1922 by the Prince of Wales, later Duke of Windsor, when he stopped in Singapore during his tour of India, Malaya, Australia and New Zealand. The French Premier George Clemenceau, who was the French Minister of War, attended the laying of the foundation stone.

After the Second World War, it was decided that the memorial should also remember those who sacrificed their lives in that conflict. Thus, the face of the Cenotaph towards the Padang commemorates the fallen of the First World War, while the other side facing the sea keeps the memory of those who perished in the Second World War but no names for this second world war are listed on the memorial.



## Singapore in Cornwall

The newspapers of Cornwall recorded some births, marriages and deaths that occurred in Singapore. Below is a selection:

Married - At Singapore, 11th January, Lieut. And Adjutant HUGH RIGG, 21st M.N.I. To MARGARET, eldest daughter of Major CARTHEW, Commanding said regiment. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 14/04/1848.*

Birth - At St. Agnes, recently, the wife of Capt. FRANCIS EVANS, of Singapore, East Indies, of a son. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 24/02/1854.*

Married - At Singapore, October 19, Lieut. T. MAGUAY, 38th Regiment M.N.I., to LOVEDAY CAROLINE, eldest daughter of Colonel POOLEY, 38th Regiment, M.N.I., and granddaughter of the late Rev. Henry Pooley, vicar of Newlyn, and rector of Lansallos. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 18/12/1857.*

Married - At St. Andrew's Cathedral, Singapore, March 22, by the Rev. W. H. Gornes, B.D., ARTHUR JOHN, youngest son of Henry PERKS, Esq., of Rheast Moor Abbey, Ramsey, Isle of Man, to EMILY, third daughter of JAMES TILLY, of Penwerris, Budock. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 06/05/1881.*

Died - At Singapore, July 14, ARTHUR H. TILLY, aged 47. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 29/08/1895.*

Birth - At Oak Cottage, Perranorworthal, Cornwall, February 11th, the wife of EDWARD IRVING, late of Singapore, of a daughter. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 17/02/1882.*

Died - At his brother's residence, 28, St. Johns Street, Devonport, JOHN ROBERTS, late secretary to the Governor of Singapore, and second son of the late William Roberts, Esq., of Mevagissey, Cornwall, formerly of Devonport, aged 79. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 23/07/1886.*

Died - At Singapore, where he was landed ill from the S.S. "Merionethshire," Mr. W.G. SCOTT, third officer of that vessel (son of Mr. Richard Scott, of St. Mawes), aged 25. *West Briton 14/03/1887.*

Died - Accidentally drowned off Singapore, July 10, Mr. GEORGE MAYNE, gunner H.M.S. Firebrand, and son on law of Mrs. Fanny Perraton, of Penzance. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 30/08/1888.*

Married - At Singapore, September 30, Mr. NEWMAN MUMFORD, C.E., to JANIE, youngest daughter of the late Captain George SHERRIS, of Scilly. *Royal Cornwall Gazette 12/10/1893.*

A memorial located in St. Day Road cemetery in Redruth mentions the death of Lionel Triniman 'lost at Singapore' in the Second world war. The marble memorial has the inscription :

*In loving memory of John Triniman died July 26 1919 aged 34.  
Lionel Phillip Triniman RN lost at Singapore, Feb. 16, 1942, aged 26.  
Greater love hath no man than this.  
Eric Wilkinson died Mar. 26 1963, aged 62.  
James Cuthbert Wilkinson, husband of Elsie, died Nov. 24, 1966, aged 73.*

Lionel, the son of John and Martha Triniman, was a leading seaman in the Royal Navy and served on HMS Prince of Wales. HMS Prince of Wales had a short but eventful career. It was completed 31 March 1941, by Cammell Laird. On 24 May 1941 Prince of Wales and the battleship HMS Hood engaged the German battleship DMK Bismarck in an historic naval engagement in which Hood was sunk and Prince of Wales was damaged, but not before Prince of Wales struck Bismarck with three of her 14" shells. Prince of Wales was repaired and subsequently transported British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to Ship Harbor, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland to meet with President Roosevelt for the Atlantic Conference from 9-12 August 1941. Prince of Wales was subsequently sunk while in defence of Malaya on 10 December 1941 (some two months before the death of Phillip Triniman) by Japanese aircraft in the South China Sea. Churchill was to sadly note in his memoirs that half the crew of Prince of Wales that attended the rendezvous with USS Augusta for the Atlantic Conference would die within the year.

Lionel is listed on the Plymouth Naval Memorial in Devon (Panel 101. Column 1). He is also mentioned on the Redruth Parish War Memorial located in Victoria Park, Redruth and again on a brass plaque located in the public library in Clinton Road, Redruth.